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AUTHOR Gundem, Bjorg B.
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ABSTRACT

A research project concerned with the development of English as a school subject in the Norwegian elementary and junior high school identifies and describes British and American influences on the theoretical climate of foreign language teaching in Western Europe from the 1950's to the 1970's. A distinct British influence, the so-called Palmer, West, and Hornby tradition (which focused on the oral method, grading and vocabulary, "standard English," and the teacher role in mediating the linguistic and lexical quality of the language) existed in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in the 1950's. The British Council offered educational services such as assistance with English teaching and expert advice to policy makers. In the 1960s, the British influence was replaced by an American influence characterized by applied structural linguistics, behavioral learning psychology, and instructional technology that materialized through the audiovisual method of foreign language teaching. The Council of Europe then became the clearinghouse and coordinating body of modern language teaching in Europe; it organized conferences at which the aims, content, methods, and examination forms of modern language teaching were discussed, and recommendations were made for changes in national curriculum decision making projects.
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BRITISH AND AMERICAN INFLUENCES ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FROM THE 1950s TILL THE 1970s MEDIATED BY THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Bjørg B. Gundem
University of Oslo[1]

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[1]. Author's address: Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo. P.O.Box 1092,0317, Oslo 3 , Norway

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Abstract

The paper is based on a research project concerned with the development of English as a school subject in the Norwegian elementary and junior high school identifying and describing influencing forces and mediating agencies.

The focus of the paper is the theoretical climate of foreign language teaching in Western Europe from the 1950s till the 1970s and the aim is to clarify and discuss British and American influences.

It is argued that there existed from the 1950s a distinctive British influence , the so called Palmer, West and Hornby tradition.The British Council having "assistance with English teaching" as a main task became after the Second World War instrumental in mediating this approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language especially to the Nordic countries, suffering from a drastic lack of qualified teachers.

The British influence was by the 1960s replaced by an American influence characterized by applied structural linguistics, behaviorial learning psychology and instructional technology, materialized through the audiovisual methodology of foreign language teaching.This approach to foreign language teaching originated during the war sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies' "Intensive Language Program". as a means to win a war.

During the post war years it conquered Europe, and the catalyst in Europe was the work of the Council of Europe in the field of modern language teaching sponsored by an enthusiastic and optimistic European climate.Under the auspices of the Council for Cultural Cooperation the Council of Europe played the role of "clearing house and coordinating body" organizing a series of conferences where the aims, content, methods and examination forms of modern language teaching were discussed and resolutions passed, to be conveyed to the political levels of decision, influencing national curriculum decision making.

It is argued that the repercussions of the change of paradigma may be questionable from political as well as pedagogical concerns.

Introduction

The aim of my paper is to clarify and discuss British and American influences in the field of modern language teaching in Europe and especially Norway from the 1950s till the beginning of the 1970s. I argue that in the first period there existed a distinctive British influence conveyed through the British Council. That influence was by the 60s replaced by an American

influence mediated by the intervening of the Council of Europe changing the prevailing theoretic climate of foreign language teaching in Europe.

The Study

The research on which the paper is based, has been concerned with the development of English as a school subject in the Norwegian compulsory elementary and junior high school. The aim of the study has been to clarify the defining and redefining of the subject in relation to educational reform in general, and specifically to curriculum revision.1)

The research interests have been historical as well as theoretical. The research methodology employed has been mainly historical. That implies investigation of archive material not publicly known, but important to get a full picture of what really happened.

From an historical point of view, the intention has been to identify and describe influencing forces and mediating agencies. Two questions especially pertaining to the focus of the present paper have been:2)

- what were the main sociatal, political, educational, linguistic and psychological influences, and
- through which national, Nordic, and international channels (that is: organizations,institutions , groups, persons) was influence exerted?

The material encompasses a series of studies of which the ones of most interest in our context are the following two:

- an analysis of the theoretical climate of foreign language teaching in the fifties and early sixties including an account of the influence exerted by institutions and organizations like the British Council,the Norwegian Council for Innovation and Research in Schools, the English Teachers' Association , and
- an account of the rapid development from the mid-sixties till the mid-seventies with its dominant influences, like educational technology, behaviorial learning psychology, and "the structural

approach" in foreign language teaching, mediated by agents like the Council of Europe and the Nordic Cultural Commission.

A Specific British Influence

It is, as already indicated, argued that there existed a specific British tradition influencing English language teaching during this period - a tradition that was different from the American one that was to come from the sixties onwards. It is possible to say that the intellectual context for this influence was the linguistic tradition from the Reform Movement and the practical-methodological one from the Direct Method.3)

Three factors contributed to giving the British primacy as the nation that turned the art of teaching English as a foreign language into a professional activity:

- the tradition and history of the British Empire
- the more recent British Commonwealth of Nations
- the growing importance of English as an international language

Especially the third factor gave impetus to the question of English language teaching in my country.

And it was the English language teaching of Harold Palmer, Michael West and A.S. Hornby that **was** the English language teaching of this period.4) Each of them in their own way may stand as true representatives or exponents of the "state of the art" :

> The eclectic approach of Palmer with its stress on the oral method and habit formation
> Michael West's grading of texts, vocabulary control and reading competence, and
> A.S. Hornby who as Anthony Howatt remarks "not only fixed English as foreign language, "but in a remarkable way succeeded in combining"...the Palmer tradition of the Oral Method with the older Sweet-Jespersen tradition of the connected text..." 5)

Trying to summarize, we may say that this era in the teaching of

English as a foreign language is characterized by stress on:

- pronunciation and intonation
- grading and vocabulary
- "Standard English"
- the role of the teacher in mediating the linguistic and lexical quality of the language
- oral activity and teaching techniques 6)

The evidenced impact on the curriculum of English in Norway follows the same pattern:

- stress on the oral method is evident in the rhetorics as in practical demonstrations
- grading of texts and vocabulary control is demanded especially from textbook writers
- the importance of extensive reading is underlined
- there is a focus on the teaching of sentence patterns and on the techniques of oral activity

The Role of the British Council:"Cultural Propaganda" or Assistance with English Teaching

The most important agency for mediating the teaching of English as a foreign language of Palmer, Hornby and West to Norwegian and other European classrooms, was the British Council.

The teaching of English as a foreign language was early listed as one of the "main tasks" of the British Council, and became soon the core activity of its educational services.

A policy of "assistance with English teaching" developed rapidly stressing especially in-service training of teachers, and expert advice to policy makers in the state administrative apparatus.7)

Courses for teachers and summer schools were among the activities reaching a considerable number of teachers from many countries including the Nordic countries. Grants of different types made possible more advanced studies for the academic staff of the departments of English in Colleges of Education and universities.

Pertinent to this is the support of the British Council in establishing a chair for the teaching of English as a foreign

language at London University in 1948, and a School of Applied Linguistics in Edingburgh in 1957. The latter foundation and those which followed in other places, proved to be of importance in the expert training of staff of the British Council itself, as well as for the training of overseas and foreign experts.

British teachers had a tradition of being as it were, in "overseas service". An acute lack of qualified foreign language teachers in Europe after the war especially in English, opened up a new labour market for British teachers with qualifications and an interest in this field of teaching.They became in many ways a kind of ambassadors for English culture and language.And it was the British Council that had the recruiting and placement responsibility for these teachers.

The British Council also exerted considerable influence through its own experts, especially in recruiting to its own staff the most prominent experts of the field like e.g.Palmer and Hornby.A special influence was mediated through the journal English Language Teaching from 1946 with Hornby as the first editor. It acted as a kind of mouth-piece for the "state of the art", and soon became an important link between the British and the "native" teachers of English as well as a forum for reports and discussions. In this way the journal became a vehicle in the process of making the teaching of English as a foreign language into a professional activity.

Notes on Influence in Norway

There are reasons to believe that the British Council already from its early days before the war exerted a specific cultural influence profitable to Norwegian teachers of English.The annals of the Oslo English Teachers'Association give solid evidence of this fact.

And in the first years after the Second World War the British Council helped to fill the enormous information and in-service gap that existed due to many years of isolation because of the war.

Of special interest in this connection are the summer courses and the work of the British Council Education Officer leading to the establishment of Britisk experts being from 1958

attached to the Ministry of Church and Education as consultants on the teaching of English .

Through regular and varied summer courses in Norway and Britain a process of re-educating and training Norwegian teachers of English was initiated.During these courses Norwegian teachers got their notions about British culture and language challenged as well as their skills in using the language and in teaching it.They were confronted with new tendencies and in this way prepared for the curricular reforms to come.

Summing up the work of the British English consultants based on a case study of the work of the first three,certain aspects are especially worth mentioning:

Their assumptions about the teaching of English as a foreign language were those of the British Council tradition.We notice the influence from Palmer in the importance they gave to the presentation part of new language items giving an emotioanl as well as cognitive impact.They adhered to the tradition of West in giving priority to gradation and vocabularity control. And they stuck to sentence patterns and drill in the spirit of Hornby.

In the political argumentization and justification for the establishment of the English consultant office, it was the school visiting part of the job that was most heavily stressed indicating the need to break the isolation of teachers in the distant districts of Norway, and giving advice and help.

Giving expert advice as to textbooks, tests and curriculum programs was also mentioned among the duties to be performed.

Their reporting back to the central school authorities was important at a conjuncture when "English for everybody" was claimed as part of a political school reform.And "keeping an eye on them" was the instruction given as far as the schools giving experimental innovative English teaching, was concerned.And there were no doubts as to the opinions of the consultants, and very often the conclusions did not support the prevalent ideas of the school authorities.

Towards a Change of Paradigma in Modern Language Teaching :The American Influence

The development in the field of modern language teaching and learning from the mid-fifties to the seventies, may be characterized as a revolution. A lot of factors joined forces in creating this situation, forces like a growing internationalization in industry, changes in travelling habits of the ordinary person, the expansion of mass media, the raising of the school leaving age in most European countries and the presence of a technology making possible the application of the latest advances in applied linguistics and in the psychology of learning.

The period experienced an impact of influencing forces more intense and extensive than ever before or after in the history of the teaching of modern languages in Europe, and perhaps especially in the Nordic countries. The linguist Peter Strevens has pointed to the international significance:

> One of the major social and educational changes taking place throughout the world in the second half of the twentieth century is a revolution in the learning and teaching of languages 8)

Strevens argues that the changes are parallel to the changes that took place when the textile industry changed from being a craft to "an applied science backed by a technology". And he claims that the changes in modern language teaching were of the same kind because we see "the application of scientific knowledge and techniques assisting the personal art of the teacher".9)

It looks as if the most thoroughgoing changes took place in Europe during the sixties. And one of the forces to bring about the changes was the American influence replacing the until now British dominance within the field of foreign language teaching.

No doubt it caused a certain amount of worry within the ranks of the British Council.Already in the British Council yearly report from 1956 the point was made:

> Now the results of American practice and research are being applied not only in America itself but all over the world, ...through its various overseas agencies, and the great philantropic and educational foundations are actively backing this work.10)

The historical context and immediate cause for the American "practice and research" within the field of modern language teaching and learning , was the will to win a war.

The status of modern language teaching in the USA had up to the Second World War been rather low. There were few options as to foreign languages. And the teaching methods and subject content were of a traditional kind stressing grammar and translation.

The Second World War and especially the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 proved to change the situation radically. It gradually dawned upon the responsible people in the Armed Forces that there would soon be a time when thousands of Americans would have to know languages they at the moment ignored the existence of.11)

The starting point was the recruiting of linguists who by their notions about language, training and interests were prepared. And so was the American Council of Learned Societies with its "Intensive Language Program" which became the basis for the first program of the Armed Forces.William Moulton describes what happened in this way:

> It is safe to say as a result, the Washinton office of the program soon became the planning center for a massive attack on the teaching of a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar languages.It is safe to say, that before the Program was over, just about every trained linguist in the country, young or old, had become involved in it.12)

Essential for the development of programs became Leonard Bloomfield's Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Languages, and the establishment of special training schools or centres.13)

And in this context certain notions about language as a basis for language teaching developed which is best described by

some famous principles, or "slogans":

1. Language is speech, not writing
2. A language is a set of habits
3. Teach the language, not about the language
4. A language is what the native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say
5. Languages are different 14)

It is important to consider these slogans in their historical context; a context where applied linguistics joined forces with learning psychology and instructional technology to bring about a way of teaching of modern languages whose chief characteristics were the structural approach, a behavioristic learning foundation and an audiolingual teaching methodology. Strangely enough it proved to be the Council of Europe , that became the American modern language teaching's chief ally in conquering the European battlefield of modern language teaching hegonomy , and that in peace time without active participation of the American themselves.

The Work of the Council of Cultural Co-operation and its sub-committees 15)

The interest of the Council of Europe in the field of modern languages originated from the stressing of the importance of foreign languages in furthering international understanding and co-operation in the articles of the Convention of 1954.This was reinforced at conferences of the European Ministers of Education in 1961 and 1962, where two resolutions were adopted advocating the expansion and improvement of modern language teaching. 16)

In 1962 the Council for Cultural Co-operation was established to "draw up and co-ordinate proposals for the cultural policy of the Council of Europe". 17) To organize the activities of the Secretariat three committees were formed with their specific areas of responsibility: The Committee for Higher Education and Research, The Committee for General and Technical Education and The Committee for Out-of-School Education.

Two important modern language teaching projects were

launched: "Major Project - Foreign Languages" from 1964 , and a few years later "An Intensified Policy for Modern Language Teaching ".

And already from 1962 onwards a series of conferences took place focusing on both the political intentions as well as the curricular implications and consequences of the Council's policies.18)

As a consequence the resolutions and the recommendations from the conferences were concerned with questions of optimal starting point and universal access as well as the "commonplaces" of a modern language curriculum: aims, content, teaching methods and teaching material.

The meeting of representatives for national school policy with the linguistic-, subject-matter-, pedagogical- as well as the audiovisual expertice of modern language teaching was a unique phenomenon pertaining to these conferences.

The impact on the national level can be traced in decisions about the instalments of language laboratories and audiovisual hardware as well as in the teaching material being produced e. g in Scandinavia especially by Swedish teacher experts or consultants attending the conferences as national representatives year after year.

The aims of foreign language teaching as they were adopted at the 1966 conference in Ostia established a priority adhered to in the forthcoming curriculum development work in many countries concerning the teaching of English in the 9-year comprehensive and basic school.These aims were as follows:

1.To enable pupils to understand speech at normal speed
2.To enable them to speak a foreign language intelligibly
3.To enable them to read with ease and understanding
4. To enable them to express themselves in writing
5. To give them a knowledge of the foreign country and an insight into its civilization and culture 19)

Discussion

Not Only Cultural Propaganda

It is a matter for discussion to what extent the English language teaching of Palmer, West and Hornby constituted a specific British tradition different from the American one. If so it is easily overlooked when the story of the development of English language teaching is told. I will, however, make one point. In their language teaching they succeeded to combine the systematic and the intuitive, as well as the pragmatic and the eclectic, and in this way avoided the dogmatism typical for the audiovisual method to come.

This British tradition became the foundation on which Norwegian textbook writers built when from the end of the fifties a new era of curriculum and teaching material for teaching English as a foreign language started.

Palmer, West and Hornby were, of course not the only ones constituting this tradition.But the way Palmer, West and Hornby seemed to fuse personal experience in language teaching with theoretical considerations, together with their impact on the field, make them representative in our context .

It was problematic that this kind of language teaching demanded a great deal from the practicing teacher in terms of personal skill in using the language, as well as in applying techniques of teaching. It also demanded fantasy and intuition to a degree that may have been wanting for the greater part of Norwegian language teachers. (The parallel to the Direct Method some decades earlier is obvious.)

The work of the British Council in materializing the language teaching of especially the Hornby era, is unique. It may be argued that it was all cultural propaganda as part of cultural imperialism, and as such dubious. It met , however, urgent needs for information and in-service training on the part of the ordinary language teacher as well as of the academic staff of Colleges of Education and university teacher training institutions.And it made available expert advice and concrete help on the levels of policy making and decision.It also made an impact on the professional climate and milieu surrounding foreign

language teaching in Norway. And this was especially due to the British consultants who, subsidized by the British Council, were attached to the Ministry of Church and Education as expert advisers for the teaching of English.

It is not easy to assess the impact of the work of the first British English consultants. The ordinary language teacher was impressed and to a certain degree amused. It is symptomatic that one of the consultants once in a report complained that the teachers looked upon his demonstration teaching as entertainment. One way to see it is to say that the consultants were true "connoisseurs" of their craft , combining theory, experience and intuition. They knew from experience what worked in the classroom.They had grasped the essentials of Palmer and Hornby, and they managed to take advantage of the specific in the situation they happened to be in.

Their impact on teacher training is a fact.Questions of teaching methods and language skills like intonation and pronunciation were given priority because of their intervention.

They exerted a specific influence on examination tests and teaching material, and they were personally engaged in developing and producing teaching material, as did other policy makers of the field.

It is , however, a fact, that not everybody on the level of policy-making and decision-taking favoured their advice. A certain strain is noticeable in the relationship between the Council for Innovation and the consultants, and there were instances where their advice was overlooked.

Their strongest influence was exerted on the academic milieu of English language teaching in Norway. Here the manifest effect is noticeable in textbooks and teacher training, and in the influence they exerted personally as models, inspirators and mediators.

Clearing House and Coordinating body

Trying to assess the influence and impact of the Council of Europe on modern language teaching in Europe from the sixties, certain determinants should be kept in mind.

First the Council of Europe was and still is, an

intergovernmental organization without any executive authority. It may pass resolutions and make recommendations, but it cannot force the member countries to adopt them.

Secondly, the national context as to modern language teaching varied at that time greatly among the different nations of Europe - as is the case today. Even if recommendations and resolutions might seem obviously clear, they would have to be interpreted and redefined in relation to the national situation and context. That also effected the degree of obligation felt by the different nations.

The expression "clearing house and co-ordinating body" has been used to describe the role of the Council of Europe in the field of modern language teaching during the sixties. 20) And it was during this period indeed a "clearing house" - a place where theories of and views on modern languages of a linguistic and educational kind were collected, and systematized.

And the Council acted as a "co-ordinating body" in giving information about and disseminating the theories and views through conferences and publications.21) Research and development projects were part of the picture.A line of policy was decided upon, and support was given to centers and institutions wanting to experiment with new methods and teaching material, like film, television, and audiovisual equipment.22)

The Council of Europe fulfilled its role as clearing house also by a series of expert meetings and study groups drawing on the linguistic and language teaching expertice of Europe.It is indeed quite remarkable to notice that now it was European linguists that were involved,especially French, British and Swedish ones.23) They brought forward the thesis of linguistic description as the starting point and basis for teaching and learning programs. At the same time the application of the structural approach linked especially to American applied linguistics like the works of Robert Lado and Charles Fries, was justified psychologically by behavioristic learning theory and practically through the new technology of the audiolingual method. It was "Next Year Jerusalem", using David Hawkridge famous title from 1976.24). The ethical and moral justification was the democratization of education : the inherent rights of everybody to master a foreign language. At the same time the

application of the structural approach was justified psychologically by a behaviouristic learning theory, and practically through the new technology of the audiolingual method. The ethical and moral justification was the democratization of education: The inherent right of everybody to master a foreign language.

That the experts were spread and distributed as lecturers at the important conferences, and as special advisors to specific countries, was part of the picture.25)

The strength of the Council of Europe as policy maker and influencing factor was due to the extraordinary grouping of people attending the different meetings and conferences. It was through them proposals were prepared and put forward, and it was the same people who recommended proposals and passed resolutions, and who in the end were responsible for the adoption of them at the national level.

It is possible to say that the scene of the foreign language conferences of the Council of Europe became the meeting place of differing interests: The political and educational-political interest of socialist progressivism, the pedagogical and subject related economic interest of the expert teacher or consultant preparing his or her series of teaching material, the theoretic and technical interest of expert linguists or psychologists experiencing the applications of their research efforts, and the pragmatic interest of the bureaucrat seeing at last some sort of way to solve the overriding problems tied to the implementation of English for all pupils in a new school system.

In retrospect it may seem that the experts and their "bandwagons" got their way too easily and dominated too much the scene of activity.

It is also a fact that instructional objectives of a practical nature easily adaptable to evaluating procedures and in compliance with the audiovisual method were given priority over general aims and a more culturally orientated subject matter curriculum -which also figured as part of the motions and recommendations.

There were protests, but they seemed to get no say until the end of the sixties when other winds from the West set out to change the prevalent theoretical climate of European modern

language teaching.

From an educational point of view it is not difficult today to point to the fact that a basic analysis of the preconditions for the teaching of a foreign language in a sosiological and sociocultural perspective was missing. Determinants of interactions in local communities, schools and classrooms were not dealt with, nor were determinants connected to the individual pupil's motivation for the learning and mastery of a foreign language.

From a linguistic point of view the objections will, however, indicate that it was the basic notions of the nature of language that were inadequate. But that is another story.

Concluding Remarks

In my paper certain influencing forces and mediating agencies tied to basic notions about the nature of language teaching and learning have been tried clarified and discussed.Certain reservations are necessary. The impact is discernable in the theoretical climate of the teaching of English as a foreign language as it is at the level of political and administrative decisions concerning whom, what and how to teach.It is also discernable in the produced and prescribed curriculum , in the textbooks and in other teaching material
following those decisions.What happened in the classrooms is, however, another story only alluded to in this paper. .

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15. Compare Gundem.B.B."Clearing House and Co-ordinating Body: The Work of the Council of Europe in the Field of Modern Language Teaching in the 1960s", in Komlosi, S.ed.:History of International Relations in Education, vol 2, Conference Papers for the 9th Session of International Standing Conference for the History of Education, Pecs, Hungary, 1987, pp.314-323

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17. Council of Europe, Committee for General and Technical Education.The Work of the Council of Europe in the Field of Modern Languages. Summary.Strasbourg 3. September 1969,pp. 2-3

18. There were meetings in Paris 1960, in London 1962, in Stockholm 1963.The most known conferences are those held in Ostia and in Ankara in 1966.

19. Report.Council of Europe Course 20.-29 April 1966. p.37

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25. For instance after the Ankara meeting in 1966, some experts stayed on as consultants to the Turkish educational authorities.